



For the most part Singapore is fast and faddy, but there are a few spots where style and charm still reside. Raffles Hotel continues its own tradition of offering both. And if there was ever any doubt, Raffles now boasts its own museum, although the Hotel is something of a living museum in its own right.

Created following a recent worldwide Heritage Search, the Museum recalls bygone days of monogrammed sherry glasses, billiard tournaments and Mr. Thomas Cook's travel Services. The display is clever and sophisticated and presents wonderful suggestions of times past through images, objects and stories. Among those who heard the call for material for the display were many a former expatriate Australian. In fact the earliest photographs of the Hotel's founding family, the Sarkies, were a gift from a granddaughter, Mrs. Emily Marcer of Sydney. Similarly, Peg Martin, an Australian pioneer air stewardess in the 1940s, contributed some of her memories.

Included in the display are early newspaper advertisements promoting the special attractions of the hotel including "electric bells throughout" and electric fans. The former now replaced by telephones, but the latter still definitely a necessity, given the often-oppressive nature of the Singapore climate. The declaration of "moderate terms" for rooms, seen in the same advertisement, is unfortunately no longer applicable.

Of the numerous photographs of times past are a great many of people partying or taking tea on the terrace. In 1912, daytime dress was essentially white, albeit white pinstriped suits, shirts and ties for the men, generally complemented by a pith helmet. Despite the cooling nature of the fine fabric and the soft colours, one dowager on the terrace and her appropriately attired male companion are both terribly flushed judging by their shiny faces. Or perhaps it is the result of too many G&T's.

Fortunately, the dress code was relaxed somewhat in later years, as another newspaper photograph of "white people in Singapore enjoying a party" from the 1940s shows. Images such as these provide a small sense of what life was like for some after the children had all been packed off home to boarding school. The grown-ups clearly all went to Raffles to party the term away.

Despite the impression that the Hotel was a place for fun and relaxation, and presumably also politicking, not everything on display promotes a positive image for the Hotel. Rudyard

Kipling's book "From Sea to Sea" published in the 1890s is rather proudly opened at the page where he declares it as the place "where the food is as excellent as the rooms are bad". Noel Coward had nicer things to say in his journal.

The Museum recalls the days of the Golden Age of Travel. And a visit to it is especially enjoyable when one is also travelling. In contrast to the e-tickets, horrendous credit card bills and the office tracking you down for "just a quick question" on your mobile, these were days of egg-cups with the Hotel monogram, packets of playing cards from the Cunard White Star Line, and Louis Vuitton sea trunks. A highlight not to be missed is the earliest known hand-written recipe for the Hotel's own "Singapore Sling" written by a barman. This came from an American guest who had enjoyed a few at the bar in 1936 and wanted to recreate it back home.

The Savoy of Singapore also boasted its own couturier, Doris Geddes, a glamorous Australian who ran the "Little Shop" in the corner of the courtyard for thirty years. Her clients included Elizabeth Taylor and the Duchess of Kent who are pictured wearing her creations. A few pieces, including very sparkly gold shoes, attest to the splendour of her work.

A visit to the Raffles Hotel Museum makes for quiet time-out in Singapore. And situated as closely as it is to a number of the Hotel's terraced cafés and bars serving gin slings, whiskey stengahs and to-die-for cakes, what more could a true cultural tourist desire?

The Raffles Hotel Museum is located on the third floor of the Raffles Hotel, Beach Road, Singapore. It is open daily from 10am to 7pm and is free to the public. It is also air-conditioned, which is definitely an asset.

*Annette Welkamp is an art and museum consultant*